

MR. GEORGE PENNIMAN, BAY CITY, MICHIGAN.

INTERVIEWED BY

WM. WAKEHAM AND RICHARD RATHBUN,

AUGUST 28, 1894.

Business.

(Has quite a large fish establishment on the river in the lower part of Bay City. Ships large quantities of fish. Is one of the partners of Trumppour of Mackinaw City).

*Experience
More protect.
needed.*

I have been here 21 years. There is no question but what our lake fisheries need more protection than they have at present.

*P. in Sag. Bay
chiefly*

In Saginaw Bay the fisheries are pound nets principally.

q.

Gill netting has been carried on ^{in Sag Bay} but very little, and that only as an experiment, which did not prove a paying one. There is a little gill netting under the ice here in the winter, in February and March, but it does not amount to much. They just get a

few herring, perch and mullets.

Sykes. They use fyke nets in the bay, but not with wings. They are set with hearts and leaders the same as pound nets, and also in the river they are the same. I do not know of a single fyke net that is fished with wings, and I brought the first fyke net into this country, that was ever seen here. The way they do it they have an outside tunnel that comes up to the top of the water, and they can take a fyke net that is not over 5 feet in diameter and fish it in 15 feet of water, by having this tunnel that comes up to the top of the water and goes down to the first hoop. The fish cannot escape it after they are once in the heart, unless they back out. We have always found that the more tunnels the more fish. The leaders are from 5 to 15 rods long. They set them in a string. The tunnel has to be as long as the water is deep. In the bay-

ous and the mouths of rivers and creeks they fish a good many of them. In the bay they fish probably 100 of these nets. This fishing is only in the winter under the ice, but occasionally you will find a pound net man with one on his pound net under the lead,

I have seen pickerel speared in 2 feet of water here in the spring. They come up to spawn in the spring. The fish lead toward the shore in the spring when they are spawning. In the fyke nets in the winter the catch is principally perch, suckers, mullets and shovel-nosed pickerel. This way of terming pike pickerel and pickerel pike is original in this country. There is no other country around the lakes where they have it the same as they have it here. What they call Saginaw pickerel are wall-eyed pike and what they call pike are pickerel.

The fyke nets are not fished in the sum-

spawning
wall-eye

spawning

Lead toward shore

Fykes, winter
perch
suckers
mullet
Esso

wall-eye
names

Fykes

mer.

● all eye
movements
spawning
P

Along in February and sometimes March, when we get some thaws the snow water from the woods runs off into the bay in streaks, and wherever the fish are laying through the winter they are attracted by this shore water and they work up. The first run are mostly small fish that come early; then from the 5th to the 10th of April the spawners commence to come up, and they all head up towards the head of the bay, and after depositing their eggs on the shore they gradually work off the same way they came in, and after the 20th of April the spawners have about all left the head of the bay, and then the nets that are set further down begin to catch them, that is pound nets. They get their run, and then the nets a little further down get theirs, until they get to the east and west points of the bay, and there

they get the last reception about June 20th. After that time they are caught beyond West Sand Point, between West Sand Point and Whitestone Point, as far as Tawas, and also at Bayport and Caseville. I had fish from Bayport I think it was July 20, last. I had one load from Caseville about the last of July. They do not spawn under the ice if the rivers are open, but will go up in the rivers to spawn. They will come before the ice is out. After July they are caught at Port Huron, through August. In the fall there are very few pickerel come up; not hardly enough to pay the fishermen to fish, and if it was not for the herring it would not pay them at all. The fall run is mostly small fish, and is very light.

Seines
It is about 8 years since there has been any seining on the Saginaw River or bay.

They used to seine at T. bico, Saganin and

*Seines**Halley**Sturgeon
Eel
w.f.*

Pine rivers and Point Lookout. The seining is done for pickerel in the spring. I never knew of any seining being done in the fall. They seine when the pickerel are spawning on the shore. We would also catch sturgeon, pike, and occasionally a whitefish when seining, but the principal thing was the pickerel. On the shore we used very shallow seines, but very long, so we used a grocers' barrel for a capstan. The seines used to be from 40 or 80 rods long. For the bay we generally used about 3 1-2 inch mesh, but for the river there was a smaller mesh used. I think probably the back was a smaller mesh. I never did any bay seining, but run some pretty large seines in the mouth of the river for a good many years

Hooks

There has been no commercial hook and line fishing, except for the hard times last fall, a good many were out catching them for

the table. There is considerable sport fishing. They fish for black bass, strawberry bass, calico and rock bass--all kinds of bass. They are generally caught around where there is sawdust on the bottom, except the black bass. We catch the sunfish and those kind of bass around these mills where there is sawdust on the bottom and they like it.

They fish clear up to the head of the *Saginaw* tributaries of Saginaw River. They use pound nets something over 20 miles up from the mouth of the river. They use a good many fyke nets in the river also. They have a State law here that allows them to set in the river until the first of November Cannot set in the spring until after the first of April. The first catch is perch, suckers or mullet in November in the river, and that continues until January when we

Short

bass.

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Saginaw R.

P.

Fyke

close season

perch.

Suckers,

mullet

begin to catch a few small pickerel; and if there is a current in the river in March they will catch some larger pickerel up to the first of April. If no current, then no pickerel. I think the close season was made because these fellows would commence about this time, and these perch and suckers are just coming up now, and they go up and fish up in these marshes and bayous, and these fellows will set to get this run that is coming in, and they will pen those fish up, and in this river and the Quannakissee River there were 100 tons destroyed every fall. Of course there was no market, that is the reason they let them waste. Lake Erie gets a large amount of those fish and they are \$2 a bbl. in the market, and these fish lay here and rot. I think the law here in the river is all right and it is too bad it was not a month later. These

Saginaw R.
-
valleys

Close season

perch,
suckers,

penning

Law for river
should be
extended

fish are a small class of fish. These men who set in the bay in September get a nice class of fish, and they can hardly dispose of them, and have to sell them for 25 cents a 100, and these fellows pen up the fish and let them rot and pollute the water.

*Walleye
Spawning*

The pickerel do not vary but a very few days in spawning. They generally get the first run from the 5th to the 10th. Their spawn in the first run is a little hard. I have noticed their spawn in the boats sometimes about April 20.

*P.
more required
now to catch
same amt. of
fish*

When I first came here a man who had one pound net could get all the fish he could handle. There were very few shipped fresh. A man who had 3 nets was a big fisherman, but unless a man has a dozen now he is not in it. The old round pound has been done away with a good many years; the old fashioned one. The pounds used here are the short tunnel

descrip

pounds. We have a fine and coarse mesh in the State of Michigan. The law requires that pounds shall not be less than 2 1-2 inch mesh, hearts not less than 4 and leaders not less than 5 inch. That is for the bay. This mesh law just applies to Saginaw Bay and River. The game warden last winter took quite a good many nets that were too small. A net will shrink about 1-4 inch. A 2 1-2 inch after it is tarred is about 2 1-4 inch.

*P.
season*
The pound nets are put in the bay as soon as the ice gets out. I remember one season the nets were set in the bay March 28, and one season they were not in until May 2.

walleye
The average would be about April 15. They are kept in until the run of pickerel begins to leave the shore. When the pickerel are out they take the nets up. They would take them out in the head of the bay earlier than

P.
Season
(no)
Loc.
they would out further. The number of stakes driven in the bay would not indicate the number of pound nets set. In the fall the first nets are driven at the outside grounds. The grounds we drive last in the spring we drive first in the fall and catch the fish coming up. Quite a number of crews are driving now, and will get their nets in early in September. They are driving now at Little Charity, Big Charity and Sand Point, and some at Tawas.

In the fall the nearest fishing to the mouth of the river is about 3 miles. In the fall they do not set so near the river as they do in the spring. At a place called Tabico is about as near to the mouth of the river as they set them in the fall. The principal catch is herring and the herring do not go as near the river as they used to years ago. They do not set the nets

chief catch
herring
Season

P. near the mouth of the river until the latter part of September. Those nets are kept in until about November 25, when they begin to pull them out. They do not fish into December. Two years ago I had to send out tugs to get some of my nets.

The catch here in the bay ^{in herring} is principally ^{herring} herring in the fall. There are not a great many herring taken here in the spring. The water is generally too dirty for herring. There are quite a number of streams empty into the bay. The catch in the fall depends upon the condition of the water, and if this dry weather continues that we have had there will be a large catch of herring in the fall, as the water is very clear up in the river, but if we have heavy rains in September and October it will make a great difference with the catch. Our heaviest run of herring comes in the fore part of

Chief catch
herring
abundance
season

Cond. of water

*Herring
Spawning*

November. We get fair fishing in October, but the herring do not come on much until the middle of October. I think the herring come in here to spawn. They spawn at the same time that the whitefish do I think, but I never paid particular attention to it. The reason the herring are caught more in the fore part of November is that the fishermen begin to pull their nets the latter part of the month.

*P.
Loc.
no.
String
Owners*

The Gillingham Bros., at Bayport have 40 nets, and they run as high as 20 in a string off toward Big Charity Island. The pounds are owned by individual fishermen mostly. There are very few firms that own their own twine.

*String
size*

The herring range in size on an average about 1-2 lb. each. A half pound herring is a pretty good sized herring. Our herring in the fall are good sized. Of course

herring & mesh

there are small herring among them. The most of the small herring go through the meshes of the nets. A herring about 4 or 5 inches long would go through the meshes. We can market herring as small as 6 inches.

How prepared

Our herring are principally all salted. We have no market for fresh herring, except for a few tons of frozen herring. We ship them out where they consume them. Lake Erie has good facilities for shipping. They load their herring into refrigerator cars which put them into New York in good time. I think there are about 10,000 half barrels of herring salted in this bay every fall. A half barrel runs about 100 lbs., but generally they will overrun. The first brine the moisture of the fish dissolves the salt. We just dry salt them and they make their own pickle. The wholesale dealers prefer to buy them in that shape as they

amt. of catch

repack them in packages of 10 lbs. up. I put out about 5,000 kegs of salt fish every spring. In salting herring we wash them after they are split. I presume 2-3 of our herring are sold for family whitefish.

herring movement
water gets warm

Herring have no particular movement in the bay. The trouble with the water in this bay is it is too shallow and gets too warm and it drives everything out in the summer, and the herring do not come on until we get some frost to cool the water, and then they come in swarms.

10% abundance distribution

There are not whitefish enough taken in Saginaw Bay to supply the home markets. They will not be taken within 5 miles of the mouth of the river. Sometimes a man will get 100 lbs. and sometimes not any. They get some nice lifts late at the mouth of the bay. They are not a good firm fish like the upper lakes fish, but seem to be soft and

quality

cannot stand transportation. We always get a few whitefish with the herring. They run with the herring some. We get a few in the spring, in June and the latter part of May. We get them in the fall, in the latter part of October when the herring come on. We get the biggest catches in the fall, but the whitefish are getting very scarce. I have never fished much around the mouth of the bay and cannot say whether they spawn there or not. Whitefish were plenty when I first came here. Their decrease has been gradual. It seems to be a general decrease, but I do not know as they are any smaller in size.

There are about 15 different varieties of fish caught here during the year. We do not get the sauger here, except once in a while a stray one. There are 2 species of bass. There is the black bass and Oswego

w/ff.
assoc. with
herring
season

abundance

spawning

15 varieties
offish

Sauger

bass,
Oswego "

bass, Some call them green or mud bass. They are around the bayous and rivers and are not a native of the lake at all. The deep water bass has decreased. There is no use of protecting the black bass for the benefit of the sportsmen in the bay. We get fatfishes, and they are quite plenty in the bay. We only get one kind in the bay. The little catfish that come in the river we call the channel cat. They are very small. We get the large catfish in the bay Silver eels are getting to be quite plenty here also. They were planted here a number of years ago; I think 8 or 9 years ago. I have not seen any eels here less than 30 inches long. They have increased in numbers here and they are breeding very fast. I weighed one on our scales this spring that weighed 5 lbs. There is no way of catching the small ones that I know of, otherwise the

*Sport.**Cat**Eels.*

small ones might be caught.

Sturgeon

The sturgeon are diminishing very fast. There is a way they could be saved--simply stop catching them in the spawning season. If a man catches one full of eggs let him throw it overboard. We do not handle to exceed 100 sturgeon a year. We used to handle them by the thousand. I think they have decreased more than any other fish. A sturgeon now will bring something like \$5. eggs and all. I have sold hundreds of them for 10 cents apiece. I do not think sturgeon will destroy as much spawn as one of these suckers. The suckers follow the whitefish and pickerel up all the time.

Suckers

There are seasons that we have got white bass and then they have disappeared again. I think 5 or 6 years ago we had quite a run of them, and have not got any since. There are quite a few sheepshead here. We are

W. Bass.

Sheepshead

beginning to sell them to Jews in New York now. I do not think I have seen half a dozen lawyers in as many years. We get the dog fish sometimes, where there are fyke nets fished.

We do not get many shovel-nosed pike, and they are on the decrease in these waters.

The maskinonge are almost all gone. They used to be quite plenty here. We got one once weighing 42 lbs. Our people in Michigan seem to like the large pike as well as the maskinonge.

The lake trout do not come up into the bay. What few are caught are taken around the mouth of the bay, at Sand Point and the Charities. Late in the fall they get quite a few there and there are quite a few speared in the winter out around the Charities. The trout were never abundant here that I know of.

ling
Amia
(Fryer)

Esox

Maskinonge

trout

We got the German carp here once and no one knew what it was. They are getting lots of those carp over in the Illinois River. We get any quantity of suckers. They are here all the time except through the summer months. There are a few coming in now with the perch. They are with us until summer time, and then they are around again in the fall. We never get any speckled trout in the bay. They have plenty in the tributaries of the Aux Gris, Rifle and Pine rivers, but native trout are not in them. I have seen quite a number of moon-eyes here, but they are not used at all. Get no menominee whitefish in the bay to amount to anything. We call them pilot fish here because they are supposed to pilot the schools of other fish. They come with the whitefish sometimes. We do not get the blue fins or long jaw in the bay.

Our whitefish here are very light in

9. carp

Suckers.

B. Trout

Mooneyes

Menominee

blue fins
long jaw

W.F.
quality.

color, and the meat is not hard and firm.

Explosives

Have never been troubled with explosives here.

offal

The offal is all supposed to be buried on the shore. There has never been any trouble with it. We do not want it in the water. When I fished at the mouth of the Saginaw I would not allow them to throw even perch skins in the water.

*Saw mill
refuse*

Have never had trouble from the refuse of saw mills in the bay. Sawdust has not troubled us any. There are no mills on Saginaw Bay until you get outside. I think sawdust has interfered with fishing at the mouth of the river as far as whitefish and herring are concerned. They burn all their sawdust now. I do not think there is any bad bottom in the bay caused by slabs or anything of that kind. The slabs are all consumed at the mills. They used to run

the hearts of the logs in the water, but they would float and eventually be washed on shore. The place where they used to put slabs in the lake a good many years ago was at Port Crescent this side of Port Austin, but that has all been done away with.

bark.
logs

We do not have any particular trouble with the bark of the logs that are rafted in here, but sometimes have trouble from the logs by the raft going to pieces during storms. There is not much raft towing after September, however, as they generally try to get the logs over before that time. The bark is pretty well off the logs before they reach the bay, especially if they have heavy weather.

Sewage
Esop

The city sewage does harm to the nets in the winter. I do not think it makes much difference with the shovel-nosed pickerel, as we find them around outhouses on the

dredges.
docks. The dredges, I think, take the sand and dirt they dredge up off east in the lake

fertilizer
Fish have never been taken for fertilizing purposes in the bay, but they have in the river. I do not know as they were taken on purpose, but they were small fish, too small for market. I think a year ago last winter a number of loads were sent up to the fertilizer. Fish would not be caught purposely for fertilizers, however.

Laws enforcement mesh O.K.
Regulate size fish
Regulating mesh
min. size walleye w.g.
I do not think the existing laws are ever enforced to amount to much. I think the laws are all right in regard to mesh, but they are not enforced properly. I think they should have a law stating the size of the fish that should be taken from the water I think that is preferable to having the mesh regulated, and would fine a man for having an undersized fish in his possession. I would have pickerel 1 lb. round and white-

fish 1 lb. dressed.

*Sturgeon
Throw out
Sturgeon with
eggs in
Shut*

I should say that the sturgeon in the spring with eggs in should be put back in the water alive in the same condition they were taken out, and, in fact, it is not necessary to take them out of the pound net, as you can throw them right over the net and let them go. They take the sturgeon eggs about June I think. The sturgeon catch is almost nothing and of course they will show an increase slowly as they are a fish that takes a good many years to mature.

*Wallace
W.F.
rate of growth*

I have always had an idea that after pickerel and whitefish were a year old they gain about 1 lb. a year.

W.F.

(Whitefish at a year old will run from 5 to 7 inches in confinement, and 2 years old they will run from 7 to 14 inches and probably weigh about 8 or 10 ounces; and the fall before they are 3 years old you will get

*Age of spawning
W.F.*

eggs from them, but not before they are 2 years old. A 3-year old fish will weigh from 1 to 1 1-2 lbs. We get the spawn from the whitefish the fall before they are 3 years old. I think the age of whitefish has more to do with the spawning than the size. I have taken eggs from wild whitefish that would not weigh over 1 lb. I do not think confinement would make any difference in regard to their spawning. I do not think the whitefish spawn before they are 3 years old. I do not think the size has anything to do with spawning. A 3-year old fish, wild, may not weigh over 1 lb. and will have ripe spawn in it. We get eggs from the brook trout the fall before they are 2 years old. From the Loch Leven we get the eggs the fall before they are 3 years old and the Von Behr the same.--Mr. F. M. Clark).

Size of Spawning
M.

B. Hunt
Age of Spawning

Trout
abundance

The market has not been crying for lake trout since last summer. I do not think the trout are decreasing much on trout grounds.

walleye.
Size and
grade

Pickerel 1 lb. and over are No. 1's. There are a good many marketed under 1 lb. The catch in the bay in the fall is 4-5 No. 2 pickerel.

w.f.
Size & Grade

No. 1 whitefish are all above 1 lb. dressed, but it depends upon the average size. If we get a good sized run it would be 1 1-4 lbs. It would be better to place the smallest size at 1 1-2 lbs. If you place it at that they might be more particular about catching them. If we catch whitefish under 1 lb. we will put them back. They can put them back if they are careful.

Smallest
market size

Throwing back

(In our pond, when we take whitefish up in our fine net 1-4 inch mesh, and take them up just as careful as possible, and

drop them over in another pond, and not handle them or anything, and out of 500 I will guarantee there will be from 5 to 10 dead fish--Mr. Clark).

Our fishermen in this bay could not live for a year if they could not catch herring, and there are not whitefish enough caught here to amount to anything as this bay has never been an important whitefish ground.

I used to catch whitefish with seines 15 years ago at the mouth of the river, and now you cannot get one within 5 miles of it.

You could throw the pickerel out without any trouble as they are hardy and tough. For a pound net for whitefish I would not have less than 3 1-2 inch mesh, and 4 inch would be better.

(You take a pound boat and go inside the pot to lift and when you get in, especially when it is full, those fish are just going

*Herring,
depends upon,*

*w.f.
small quantity*

*former distrib
in bay.*

*Walleye
throwing out-*

*P.
mesh
out.*

right round and round. How many small whitefish do you think would ever get through a 3 1-2 inch mesh? The larger the mesh is, of course, the more would go through, but it does not seem to me that very many of those fish would go out of those meshes. You take a 4 or 5 inch pot and you will catch a good many herring.-- Mr. Clark).

(I saw a school of mackerel come in, and there were no small meshed seines to be had, and the men got out their salmon nets, 7 inch mesh, and seined the mackerel and got them; about 80 barrels.--Wakeham).

*Seine
Expensive method*
fish & fish
Seine fishing is the most expensive fishing there is. If there are only a few fish in a coarse mesh net, those few will be a very nice size, but if there is a large quantity in there will be a good many small ones, and if you dip them up with a dip net you will

get some.

The smallest size sturgeon that should be taken should be 3 feet.

I think too many nets in a string are fished in some places in Saginaw Bay. I do not know as you could get strings much closer together. Those nets that run out from North Island over to Big Charity hurt the fishing more than the others. Some of those strings are 3 miles long. I would not have over 7 or 8 pots in a string.

There are a lot of fishermen who are too poor and cannot afford to fish so many pots and they get cut off. The leaders are usually from 60 to 100 rods each. The inside leaders are longer than the outside ones. I think they should limit the length of the leaders. Through the bay the strings range from a little less than 1-2 mile, to 1 1-2 miles. I do not know of 2 strings

min. size
sturgeon

P.
too many in
string

strings

leader

P.

ever being set on one ground. Each man has one string on his frontage and the distance apart depends upon the length of his frontage. There are about 300 ^{perch} ~~fish~~ fished inside the bay.

9w.

Fykes.

Perch

The fyke nets only take the cheap class of fish. I think the perch have plenty of protection under the new law. Nothing less than 4 oz. perch shall be taken, and anything smaller than that shall be put back immediately in as good condition as when taken out.

Herring

The herring do not need any protection; they are just as abundant as they ever were. I would not limit the size as the small ones are not worth anything either fresh or salted. The small ones go through the meshes generally.

(+ mesh)

Fewer P. would
take as many
fish

I think if they had fewer nets and had them further apart the catch would be just

as good. Oftentimes one man will set a string of nets to shy the fish away from his neighbor.

